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ABSTRACT

The relationship between literacy achievement in schools, socioeconomic marginality and cultural difference has been a central theme in literacy research since the late 1960s emergence of civil rights movements. Contemporary approaches to literacy education all begin from the assumption that "more" or "better" reading and writing competence will necessarily yield increased school performance and various socioeconomic "payoffs" for students. Further, alternative critical approaches--including those based on models of critical pedagogy, textual deconstructionism and functional linguistics--also presuppose that particular practices with texts can "make a difference" in students' life trajectories. This paper describes these narrative models of success and folk theories of literacy based on particular mythologies of the value and outcomes of school-acquired literacy. The paper outlines a sociological model of literacy as cultural capital. The paper argues that whether, when, and how school-acquired literacy makes a difference in students' distinction and life trajectories is sociologically contingent on the availability of other forms of capital (e.g., social, economic and symbolic) and the patterns of the conversion and exchange of capital in particular social/institutional fields. Contains 58 references and a figure describing the types of capital. (Author/RS)

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WHEN LITERACY MIGHT (NOT) MAKE A DIFFERENCE:

TEXTUAL PRACTICE AND CAPITAL

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Abstract

The relationship between literacy achievement in schools, socioeconomic marginality and cultural difference has been a central theme in literacy research since the late 1960s emergence of civil rights movements. Contemporary approaches to literacy education all begin from the assumption that 'more' or 'better' reading and writing competence will necessarily yield increased school performance and various socioeconomic 'payoffs' for students. Further, alternative critical approaches -- including those based on models of critical pedagogy, textual deconstructionism and functional linguistics -- also presuppose that particular practices with texts can 'make a difference' in students' life trajectories. This paper describes these narrative models of success as folk theories of literacy based on particular mythologies of the value and outcomes of school-acquired literacy. It outlines a sociological model of literacy as cultural capital. It argues that whether, when and how school-acquired literacy makes a difference in students' distinction and life trajectories is sociologically contingent on the availability of other forms of capital (e.g., social, economic and symbolic) and the patterns of the conversion and exchange of capital in particular social/institutional fields.

WHEN LITERACY MIGHT (NOT) MAKE A DIFFERENCE: TEXTUAL PRACTICE AND CAPITAL

What is the 'payoff' for the practices of school literacy? This paper offers a theoretical model for explaining the sociologically contingent consequences of literacy. That model draws principally on Pierre Bourdieu's (1984, 1986, 1991) theorisation of differing types of capital available to the "habitus" in particular social fields. I begin by providing a brief overview of popular and educational assumptions about the powers of literacy, drawing on John Ogbu's (1987) work to show how such popular and professional assumptions are based on narrative, folk theories of literacy. I then turn to the work of Bourdieu to offer an alternative explanation of literacy as cultural capital. This model, I argue, provides a much broader and more complex sociological template for identifying the contingent factors that influence the local value, efficacy and limits of school-acquired literate practices and competences.

Textual Payoffs, Kickbacks and Jumpstarts: Does Literacy Make a Difference?

There is an extensive Western folklore about the power of literacy. One of the principal historical consequences of the technology of writing is that writers have used it to construct a narrative mythology about its own efficacy in the world, ranging from Sartre's **Words** and Shaw's **Pygmalion** to Rodriguez's **Hunger of Memory** and hooks' **Talking Back.** These and other biographical and literary statements about the powers of literacy have made crucial contributions to the common sense of teachers, educational researchers and curriculum developers (e.g., Villanueva, 1993; Gilyard, 1991).

The history of state schooling and mass literacy instruction is marked by product guarantees for school-acquired literate practice, ranging from promises of moral salvation and intellectual prowess, to those of economic productivity and political participation. In more recent postwar contexts, media reports have tended to attribute a range of economic and social ills to the failure of state schooling to provide adequate kinds and levels of literacy. They go on to suggest that increased capacity to read and write can be a panacea for individual and collective moral, economic and social decline (Green, Hodgens & Luke, 1994). Comments like the following surrounded the 1991 release of Australia's **National Language and Literacy Policy**:

> Illiteracy is estimated to cost the nation $3.2 billion a year in lost production, such as through workplace accidents and health problems caused when workers cannot understand safety instructions written in English (Bita, N., "Literacy Strategy Targets Home, Workplace", ***Weekend Australian***, 31/8/91, p. 3).

Illiteracy and literacy tend to be marked in diametrical opposition: in this case, illiteracy defined as individual 'lack' and literacy seen as a kind of steroid treatment for national economic atrophy.

At the news conference release of the national policy, John Dawkins, then Commonwealth Minister of Employment, Education and Training (note the triad of functions, i.e., minister of human capital), commented on a broad range of possible consequences for the policy. In terms of the imperative to expand the teaching of Asian languages, Dawkins argued that "if we are going to be the kind of international nation, as a trading nation, and with an important political role to play, particularly in this region, it's crucial in my opinion and in that of the government, that more Australians should speak foreign languages". Extending the human capital rationale that had informed his government's policies in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Dawkins went on to note the need for "higher levels of proficiency" in literacy and languages "necessary for participating in technical and scientific areas" (Green, Hodgens, & Luke, vol. 2, p. 211).

Claims about the power and efficacy of literacy in public discourse are not recent developments, extending in countries like Canada, Australia, the US and the UK at least back to the late 19th century (Graff, 1978). Hence the historical contours of public discourse extend from deficit arguments, most recently triggered in the US and UK via the Right's critique of the welfare state, and the curtailing of public sector services to accommodate the shift from postwar economic expansion to economic corporate globalisation. However, what is interesting is the degree to which teachers and professional organisations themselves become complicit in these discursive moves, especially through their enthusiastic endorsement of media representations of literacy (and hence, of their own work) as a potential salve for the "disease" and "inheritance" of illiteracy, and for affiliated forms of moral, familial and individual decay. Consider the following excerpt from a national newspaper several months before the Australian national policy was introduced.

ILLITERACY MAY BE INHERITED

> Nearly one third of children identified as having literacy difficulties have at least one parent who can't read or write, ... There is strong

> evidence that illiteracy is an inherited trait, and some educationalists believe that it is a contagious disorder best cured by treating the whole family. But rather than being inherited through genes, the illiteracy problem is passed on through a lack of adult emphasis on the importance of reading and writing. ... (Egan, C., "Illiteracy May Be Inherited", *The Weekend Australian*, 29-30/6/91, p. 1).

There is nothing new here. The genealogy of pseudoscientific and scientific claims that link illiteracy with an epidemiology of poverty, disease and, invariably, genetically predisposed membership of an underclass extends the length of the history of modern psychology (e.g., Gould, 1991). These arguments historically have been intertwined with grand narratives that 'scientifically' demonstrate the genetic inferiority of women, indigenous peoples, colonised peoples, and people of colour (cf. Haraway, 1986; Young, 1994).

But what is notable is that the foregoing article was based on the recent advocacy by liberal teacher educators and researchers of home reading programs and parental intervention in early literacy development. There is, of course, a compelling case to attribute this to sensationalism, distortion, misrepresentation and whatever the educational comparable to 'yellow journalism' is. Literacy has been and remains 'good press'. But in a recent documentary history of 50 years of Australian public literacy debates, we found that claims about the sociocultural causes of illiteracy and the possibilities for literacy as a social and economic cure all are not the exclusive purchase of populist politicians, right-wing commentators and conservative groups. They often are sourced in the announcement and advocacy of recent pedagogical developments, findings and interventions by teachers, teacher-educators and researchers (Green, Hodgens & Luke, 1994).

In terms of how teachers and educators can best contend with the media, we might begin by reconsidering our own participation in the creation of mythologies about the 'powers of literacy'. We may be inhabiting a Gary Larsen cartoon where 'we have met the enemy and it is us'. For the tendency for the past two decades in Western countries has been for educators to accept government and, in instances, corporate funding with at least the tacit undertaking that literacy education **does** have the potential to advance the economy, enfranchise marginalised groups, deal with structural poverty and inequality, ameliorate questions of lack of access to racist and sexist institutional structures, and so forth. The theme of this paper is that in and of itself literacy education has no such automatic power. It might -- but when, if and how are sociologically contingent enterprises.

The promises and discourses of progressive-era human capital literacy education have become habituated in common sense: in the assumptions of differing and, at times, adversarial skills, whole language, genre, cultural and critical literacy advocates about the ameliorative and transformative powers of literacy. In a way, the degree to which schools and teachers are (however justly and indefensibly) held accountable for structural social, economic and cultural problems is a kind of poetic justice, insofar as we have often failed to temper those pronouncements, our own and those of governments and school systems, about the powers of literacy to change structural economic problems.

But to its credit, in its particular version of economic rationalism, the official Ministerial press release went on to view literacy as

> . . . an important social justice objective. Poverty, fewer life opportunities and the ability to communicate needs and problems successfully and reduced access to community services are the sad consequences of illiteracy in our society. This policy will go a long way to improving life opportunities for thousands of Australians" (Department of Employment, Education and Training Press Release, 'Dawkins Announces New National Policy on Language and Literacy for Australia", 2/10/91).

Elsewhere, I have described the continuing efforts of the Australian Labor government to lodge economic rationalist agendas within broader objectives and discourses of social justice, however uncomfortably (Luke, 1995). The degree to which this approach -- while it has sustained the interests of capital -- has enabled 'gaps' for ameliorative and targeted social interventions differentiates it from Thatcher and Reagan-era human capital arguments. The National Language and Literacy Policy is a case in point. Since its launch in 1991, it has since provided a legislative base for the provision of millions of dollars annually to language and literacy initiatives across Australian educational systems, ranging from the sponsorship of curriculum development and inservice work in adult literacy, to guidelines for private sector and government training initiatives, to extended ESL infrastructure and curriculum support, to research and development in early childhood reading interventions, and the expansion of school curriculum for teaching languages other than English. Across these interventions have been calls for a pragmatic blending of economic rationalism with the need to provide improved educational infrastructure for targeted equity groups -- however contradictory such a strategy might seem in light of the effects of economic globalisation on the articulation of an underclass in Western countries (Harvey, 1994).

In this context, we can reexamine the original press release, noting the logic of the Minister's position that poverty is a consequence of illiteracy, rather than a cause of it. Yet the aim of the intervention, in the Minister's last word here is to "improve life opportunities". Public statements like those above -- including those speech acts of public policy that have the force of redistributing public funds and generating legislative intervention -- are premised on a set of assumptions about the linkages between literacy and the social. Literacy studies has come a good distance since Scribner and Cole's (1981) demonstration of the problems of conflating the effects of schooling with those of literacy. Yet contemporary accounts of literacy remain, in Blye Frank's (pers. com., 3/95) terms, further "social constructions of the social". They are broad textual articulations of taken-for-granted 'Truths' about the linkages of literacy achievement and "life opportunities" of communities and individuals that are at once mythological and commonsense. My question here is: How can we theorise the social consequences of literacy acquired in formal, state-sponsored programs and institutions?

This is the central issue in this paper: What are the effects of literacy? The ethnographic literature of the 1980s (and a good deal of Foucault-inspired discourse theory) would suggest, of course, that it all depends on "context". Since the publication of ***Ways with Words*** (Heath, 1983) -- a key historical nodal point in the critique of psychological, skills-based accounts of literate development -- there has been an ongoing focus on the 'local', on an ethnographic present, guided both by the tenets of ethnographic and qualitative research paradigms. So it is axiomatic now to claim that whether and how literacy might make a difference all depends on the context. Context is variously defined in terms of classrooms as discourse communities (Green & Weede, 1994), in terms of larger community settings and their interfaces with schooling (Schieffelin & Gilmore, 1985; Barton & Ivanic, 1991; Fairclough, 1992), in terms of secular and non-secular subcultures (Kapitzke, 1994), or in terms of broader formations of culture (e.g., Street, 1994).

Despite this extensive work, and some attempts to draw it together into a unified view of the social contexts and consequences (e.g., Barton, 1993; Gee, 1990; cf. Durante & Goodwin, 1993), many of those of us working in the fields of teacher education, curriculum development and school-based literacy instruction continue to 'fly blind' on this basic issue of our capacity to model and predict field-specific social effects of literate competence for individuals' life trajectories, and to model and predict broader scale ('aggregate'?) effects of increased literacy on economic development and political enfranchisement of communities at the margins of the mainstream economy and polity. To avoid the relativism, or perhaps we should call it

determinism, of a narrow focus on the local -- there is a need for a model of the social consequences of literacy that both provides a template for looking at local contexts and at possible consequences of teachers' and students' work in classrooms. To avoid a return to a 'universal effects' model of literacy -- such as those psychological and literary models that have dominated the field until recently -- there is a need for a template that provides a coherent vocabulary for describing locally contingent sociological effects, without determining their configuration a priori.

My aim, then, here is to generate a sociological vocabulary for talking about the consequences of literacy in particular social sites or 'fields'. In what follows, I first want to propose the derivative notion of folk theories of literacy, drawing upon the strikingly distinct work of John Ogbu (1987) and Jean Francois Lyotard (1982). My position here is that contemporary approaches to the teaching of literacy are based on the construction of 'grand narratives', explanatory templates about the effects of literacy that cast a particular methodological approach to literacy education as protagonist. I then apply Bourdieu's work on cultural capital and the habitus to generate an alternative sociological approach to reading and deconstructing narrative accounts of the consequences of literacy.

Writing about the Power of Writing: Folk Theories of Literacy

Ogbu's widely-cited work suggests that different minority groups (e.g., "castelike", "immigrant") build up distinctive plausibility structures about success in schooling, jobs and access to wealth. These "folk theories of success" explain and rationalise minorities' mobility and/or immobility in relation to majority power structures, social institutions and so forth (Ogbu & Mantute-Bianchi, 1986). Ogbu (1987) views these shared explanations for the apparent patterns which govern life trajectories as constitutive interpretations of what counts as success. These in turn have significant effects on group attitudes and intergenerational practices. In this way, we could describe the schemata for, for instance, how overseas Chinese cultures narrate gendered life trajectories, constructing cultural imperatives for education, economic success and intergenerational mobility among, say, Chinese males (e.g., Pieke, 1991). Further, as H. Luke's (1994) case studies of Australian minority families indicate, there may be direct conflict between school officials' "folk theories" about particular minority groups and those of the families and children themselves.

Ogbu's stress on how marginal groups define themselves in relation to and in opposition to dominant cultures is complementary to recent postcolonial theorisations of minority discourses (e.g., JanMohammed & Lloyd, 1990;

Williams & Chrisman, 1994; Keesing, 1994). It also begins to suggest the degree to which the internalisation of a narrative chain -- a common sense or cultural logic about 'the way things are and will be' -- can become an effective "technology of the self" (Foucault, 1988), a symbolic means whereby one regulates her or his own life trajectories through and across social institutions. Further, recent work documents the ways in which particular marginalised groups construct particular emplotments that are forms of 'talking back' (hooks, 1989) and "speaking out" (Etter-Lewis, 1991), complex counter-discourses that break with narrative archetypes and begin to remake racist and sexist relations.

My point here is that Bourdieu's sociological explanation of education and learning can provide a narratalogical schema for looking at what we might term, adapting Ogbu, **folk theories of literacy**. For Bourdieu (1986, 1991), the basis of learning is the habitus, the derivative, structured and structuring location of learning, sensibility, taste, knowledge and practice. By Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) account, the habitus is the sum total of one's cultural capital acquired through the pedagogic action of families, schools, churches, etc. A biographical life trajectory involves the navigation and movement of habitus across social fields. We could here redefine social fields in terms of institutional sites of discourse. That is, all social institutions -- corporations, courts of law, particular disciplinary departments, stores, workplaces, political parties, and families -- are constructed by and of specific discourses. That is, they are defined by and through, and constitute the particular textual "forms of life" available to human subjects in these fields (Gee, 1990).

Folk theories of educational success are emplotments of forms of rationality about life trajectories, assembling chains of 'if/then' propositions that can be read as causal links (e.g., if one can produce genre X, then one's academic success will improve; if one acquires reading skill Y, then one's ability to deal with new texts will improve). These narrative chains are the raw materials of common sense formulae for the passage of the habitus through particular social fields. In this way, we could reconsider folk theories as axiomatic accounts of the interaction of the habitus with particular forms of pedagogic action, and accounts of how systems of communication and exchange yield differing kinds of value, or capital in distinctive social fields. By this synthetic account drawn broadly from Bourdieu, we can describe the pattern of the trajectory in the following recursive pattern:

> **habitus (cultural capital) → life trajectories → social fields (exchange value)**

As I suggested in my introduction, working as teachers and parents we build up our own cultural commonsense about the payoff of particular selective traditions. We might observe, for instance, that exposure to a particular piece of literature visibly 'made a difference' for a particular student, or that, the learning of grammatical metaphor or poetic trope altered a particular individual's or cohort's his world view or pattern of academic achievement.

As presented in pre and in-service training, and later reconstructed and transformed in staff room talk, parent/teacher talk, teachers' articles and guidebooks -- particular approaches to literacy education build comparable narrative chains about the 'powers' of literacy. That is, all approaches to the teaching of literacy are based on contrasting emplotments that propositionally link the acquisition of literacy and series of consequences -- whether these are described in cognitive, intellectual, linguistic, social or cultural terms. Consider, for instance, some of the following syllogisms underlying some contemporary approaches to literacy:

(1) The skills hypothesis: That skills acquisition will lead to improved cognitive competence and, hence, personal ability and achievement; that is, that literate success can be defined in terms of individuated, internal absence/presence, is aggregative and has psychological payoffs.

(2) The personal growth hypothesis: That individual 'voice' and expression will lead to psychological development; that is, that literate success is a matter of expressing individual difference, establishing self-esteem, identity and 'choice'.

(3) The genre hypothesis: That the capacity to produce particular text types will lead to enhanced academic success and social mobility; that is, that literate success is tied to mastery of institutionalised linguistic forms that 'gatekeep' access to symbolic and material wealth.

(4) The critical literacy hypothesis: That the capacity to critique and deconstruct particular texts will lead to social analysis and action; that is, that literate success is tied to political and social engagement.

These are, of course, quick illustrative sketches of variable positions that which been characterised and critiqued, deconstructed and parodied in far more detail elsewhere (e.g., Freebody & Welch, 1993). My purpose here is not to detail them, nor at this point to critique them as 'Truths' about the value and potential of literacy education and schooling. My point here is that differing approaches to literacy make implicit or explicit claims about their results, increasingly in the 1980s and 90s using the rhetoric of

"empowerment" (Luke, in press/a). These claims, in turn, are transformed in teachers', teacher educators', parents', researchers' and some students' 'common sense' about the payoffs, kickbacks, jumpstarts and outcomes of literacy. Hence, as Comber's (in preparation) study of South Australian urban lower socioeconomic schools suggests, teachers' and students' everyday plausibility structures about the power of literacy are ubiquitous in practice. Consider, the degree to which the following emplotments might seem familiar:

> **Narrative 1: student → scaffolded experience → higher cognitive abilities, scientific knowledge → 'critical thinking' → . . .**
>
> **Narrative 2: student → learns text in context → becomes 'empowered' → . . .**
>
> **Narrative 3: student → lacks code → skill acquisition in explicit reading pedagogy → better school achievement → . . .**
>
> **Narrative 4: student → deconstructs popular culture text → develops critical, reading position → . . .**

I have deliberately avoided attempting to provide narrative illustrations of the aforementioned 'schools of thought' about literacy, because there is little evidence that teachers simply act as ventriloquists for grand theories of literacy (Comber, in preparation). Rather they transform and explicate them in local sites in relation to their and their colleagues own class, cultural and professional experience. Whatever their exact propositional content, then, these particular folk theories of literacy are reflexively formulated and used by teachers and others to organise and inform their local practice, including curriculum and assessment decisions, on a daily basis.

Note two surface characteristics of these narratives. First, all appear to have some basis, however unrefined and explicated, in contemporary theory and research on literacy. Second, I have left each 'open ended' (e.g.," . . ."), as an unfinished propositional chain that does not extend beyond individual and academic effects within the school. In what follows, I want to take up each of these aspects of the argument further.

In order to establish validity within contemporary state educational systems, approaches to literacy historically have made claims to scientific legitimacy (Luke, 1988). That is, they must appear to be descriptive and not prescriptive, scientific and not normative: visibly based on theoretically or empirically defensible claims about how literacy is learned and used. In

other words, these particular narrative chains must justify themselves by recourse to scientificity, facticity and Truth -- following the general axiom that literacy is a phenomenon that is knowable, definable and, indeed, prescribable on the basis of science. As Foucault would hasten to remind us, truth is not Truth unless it is recognised as such.

Yet this claim that literacy is a scientific (and not moral, religious or ethical) object -- itself the overarching proposition that has dominated literacy research and practice in the West for the past hundred years -- is itself a narrative claim, one that posits 'science' as a protagonist in a grand narrative of education. Lyotard (1982) argues that the history of modernity has been characterised by the domination of scientific/written knowledge over narrative, the former affiliated with writing, the latter with speech, the former with industrialising,civilising drives of scientificity, exactitude, methodological rigour and ultimately 'Truth' , the latter with folk, oral and, ultimately, literary and subjective experience. Lyotard's key move is to suggest that the legitimation of scientific knowledge is also based on narrative grounds: that the hegemony of scientific knowledge relies for its efficacy on the building of a grand narrative of modernity at the heart of which science is the key protagonist. In this way, the growth and unfolding of scientific knowledge towards truth is itself an emplotment, a narrative teleology. It is on this basis that Lyotard argues for the widely-cited skepticism towards metanarratives, a skepticism based on the understanding that science *qua* tautological and self-descriptive narrative has no hierarchically superior ontological validity or status from folk theories, oral histories, *bildungsroman* or other forms of narrative.

On this basis, let me make a similar claim about literacy pedagogy. Differing approaches to literacy pedagogy make validity claims based on scientificity when in fact they construct and are predicated on distinctive folk theories of literacy that may or may not have broad empirical support. With this general critique in mind, I want to return to my second piece of unfinished business: how the narrative chains of these folk theories may extend from individual and academic effects to broader assertions about the social consequences for individuals, communities and nation-states. To get a sense of how these folk theories might extend beyond the school, consider the following hypothetical transformations to the narratives above:

> **Narrative 1: student → scaffolded experience → higher cognitive abilities, scientific knowledge → 'critical thinking' → . . . better worker → more productivity → increased national economic performance.**

Narrative 2: student → learns text in context → becomes 'empowered' → . . . takes activist role as citizen/worker.

Narrative 3: student → lacks code → skill acquisition in explicit reading pedagogy → better school achievement → . . . asserts social mobility through higher levels of educational achievement than parents' generation.

Narrative 4: student → deconstructs popular culture text → develops critical, reading position → . . . uses deconstruction to build better corporate advertising campaign (postmodern nightmare!).

Before you dismiss these additional propositions as deliberately mischievous (which they are), reconsider the claims made by the Minister of Employment, Education and Training at the onset of this discussion. There we could see that actual national policy was predicated on particular assumptions about the consequences of literacy, that policy-making itself is an narrative enunciation (cf. Luke, Nakata, Smith & Singh, 1995). So, however wild they may seem, the additional propositions added to Narrative 1 are indeed those of the human capital model operational in contemporary policy and the press. Or for that matter, consider Narrative 1 in light of contemporary claims made for the value of "critical thinking" in the corporate sector by deBono and others. Narrative 2 reflects some of the assumptions underlying current "critical literacy" curriculum in Queensland and South Australian state curriculum documents. Narrative 3 represents the logic underlying any one of a number of early intervention programs that attempts to 'bootstrap' children of minority or lower-socioeconomic groups into better literacy achievement (e.g., reading recovery), achievement defined in terms of improvements on conventional skill tests and so forth (cf. Edelsky, 1991). Finally, reconsider Narrative 4 in light of the emergent critique of the limits of "critical literacy" based on the UK experience with media and cultural studies curriculum (e.g., Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1995).

One of the key implications of Ogbu's work is that the models of human subjects' life trajectories projected in mainstream institutions' pedagogies, methods and schemes have political effects, an assumption shared by Heath (1983), Delpit (1988) and Gee (1990). Such models may be systematic articulations of exclusionary and discriminatory practices, stories of limited scope and personae. For instance, the 'misreading' of the African-American child's oral, literary narrative that Gee (1990) suggests many teachers would make, or the 'misrecognition' of cultural practices as behavioural problems described by Heath (1983) can be reinterpreted as moments in larger

narrativisations of African-American students' life trajectories.

Yet does skepticism towards grand narratives imply that all educational narratives are equally plausible and, perhaps, that principled pedagogical intervention should focus on establishing a 'space' within mainstream institutions for alternative patterns of individual and community, cultural and economic development? This has certainly been the orientation of some recent approaches to feminist pedagogy and minority education (e.g., Luke & Gore, 1993; Nieto, 1993). Are we left simply with voices and positions, all with equal ontological validity and material effects? Should this lead us to conclude that literacy education is just a matter of picking one's narrative and taking one's chances? Or, for that matter, that a critical educational project trodding down the well-worth paths of ideology critique should focus principally on remaking these and other apparent 'mis' readings, 'mis' contextualisations and 'mis' representations?

Not all stories turn out the same. The skepticism that I am arguing for here suggests, at best, the social contingency and, at worst, the fallibility of pedagogic science -- that the sciences of literacy conceal competing moral, normative agendas for the construction of the social and institutional effects of literacy. Further, if all cultural and biographical histories are normative and not necessarily or exclusively descriptive enterprises, then accounts of the consequences of literacy should be examined and debated on moral and political, and not exclusively 'scientific' grounds (as several leading journals and research forums continue to do). The perspective I have developed here provides us with grounds for a contrastive analysis of particular approaches to literacy as an entry point for theorising and hypothesising the material effects of pedagogy on life trajectories. If we accept that literacy has malleable social, political and cultural consequences, then our focus has to be on developing ways of discussing the possible material consequences and narrative outcomes of particular plottings of the literate subject. Here I want to return to my initial argument: that we need a template for analysing the sociological contingencies that influence how and why school-acquired literacy might 'make a difference'.

Literacy and Capital

Since the mid-1980s, descriptions of literacy as cultural capital have become an integral part of the debates over social effects (Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Collins, 1993). Elsewhere, I have explored the formation of the habitus in early literacy education (Luke, 1992; see also, Kamler, Maclean, Reid & Simpson, 1993), and undertaken a more fine grained exposition of

Bourdieu's work on capital in relation to the claims of "genre pedagogy" (Luke, in press/a). Further, Collins (1993) and Cicoural (1993) discuss at length the more general ramifications of Bourdieu's work on an educational outcomes.

As noted, literacy education is tied up with the institutional construction of the "habitus", which for Bourdieu is the locus of class, cultural and gender identity and value. Further, students' differential "discursive resources" (Luke, in press/b), the sum total of their embodied cultural capital, are taken out into differing fields as part of their life trajectories. By this account, students' paths though various social fields are not determined or 'caused' in any structural sense, although they are mediated by their available capital and the laws of conversion of capital within and across specific social fields. Social fields here roughly correspond to institutional domains of work, identity and discourse. Each of these fields, in turn, is not just a domain of discourse, but as well constitutes a "local sociology" (Luke, 1995) -- a system of communication and exchange wherein particular patterns of 'value' are established and defined (Wilden, 1982).

But beyond the general narrative linkages between habitus, cultural capital, life trajectory and field, more detailed categories for describing the value of the cultural capital acquired and certified by the school are required. Bourdieu (1984) describes four kinds of capital in the following schema (see Figure 1):

Insert Figure 1 About Here

SYMBOLIC CAPITAL Institutionally recognised and legitimated authority and entitlement requisite for the conversion of Cultural, Economic and Social Capital		
CULTURAL CAPITAL	Embodied Capital	Knowledges, skills, dispositions of the bodily habitus
	Objectified Capital	Cultural goods, material objects and media physically transmissible to others
	Institutional Capital	Academic qualifications, professional certificates and credentials
ECONOMIC CAPITAL		Material goods and resources directly translatable into money.
SOCIAL CAPITAL		Access to cultural and subcultural institutions, social relations and practices

Figure 1: Types of Capital

In what follows, I provide a gloss of each form of capital described in Figure 1 with specific reference to language and literacy education.

Cultural capital describes the sum total of durable knowledges and practices, discursive and material resources acquired by individuals as they develop across their life trajectories. The shaping of an individual's habitus occurs in the contexts of a range of social institutions, from the primary pedagogic action experienced in homes and communities to the secondary pedagogic action engaged in schools, churches, clubs and other more formal institutions. In distinguishing between the primary and secondary, Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) early model of pedagogic action tends to stress the primacy of pre-school language and literate training. That

socialisation, central to the construction of the habitus, occurs through symbolic violence: namely, through the assertion of the dominance of what Bourdieu (1991) considers "arbitrary" symbolic systems (e.g., namings, taxonomies of difference, categorical structures of knowledge, differentiations of value and taste).

Children leave school training with syntheses of kinds of cultural capital: embodied capital, objectified capital and institutional capital. All can be used to describe the consequences of literacy. In terms of **embodied capital**, the child is trained in a set of knowledges, practices and dispositions of the bodily habitus (Luke, 1992). That is, he or she learns to 'be', 'do' and to embody the traits and practices of a particular kind of literate subject. This may entail visible and audible procedural display of particular forms of judgement, practices and matters of 'taste', as well as particular physical and apparent dispositions towards speech and the verbal display of taste, knowledge. At the same time, knowledge acquisition and use entails an internalisation of symbolic systems, learning of a particular vision of the natural, social and cultural order, even where that vision may serve others' class and cultural interests.

Within the school, embodied capital may be readily converted into particular forms of **objectified capital**. That is, students may leave schools, universities and other institutions with particular kinds of 'portfolios', visible objectified signs of embodied capital. This may entail particular texts and other artefacts s/he or others have produced that are affiliated with particular kinds of status, prestige and 'success'. For instance, a postgraduate student will leave with his or her thesis, or articles, visible signs that s/he has requisite embodied capital. The push towards portfolio-style assessment in elementary and secondary schools suggests that students front up with material textual or behavioural evidence -- much as musicians or graphic artists do -- of her or his literate achievements. Where this objectification is not done through examination and testing, it can also be done through observation, what some whole language advocates have called "kid-watching". The delivery of visible, measurable objectified capital, then, is a form of performativity (e.g., the performance indicators demanded in the new managerialism). These forms of objectified capital may take the shape of actual material identity papers.

Institutional capital may be taken to refer to those particular academic qualifications, professional certificates, credentials that schools and other institutions grant to students. These constitute institutional recognition that the student has demonstrated embodied and objective capital sufficient for "official" certification..

In all, then, the school plays a focal role in the production of literacy as cultural capital. It does so by producing embodied capital, objectified capital and institutional capital. However, the production of literacy *qua* cultural capital is differential: that is, particular groups and communities are introduced to different kinds and levels of capital. Different visible, demonstrable and certifiable 'literates' and multiple 'literacies' are produced. Furthermore, there is no necessarily consistent or rational relationship in the allocation of types of cultural capital. Each institution sets up overt and hidden rules for the transformation of capital: that is, one may develop embodied capital but fail to receive correlative credentials; or one may develop the objectified capital, in, say, a writing program, but with limited translation into institutional capital, or for that matter, one without embodied capital may receive institutional certification because of other interests and influences at play. What this suggests is that the internal rules within the school for the local production of cultural capital may be somewhat arbitrary, fraught with leakage and apparent pragmatic accident. Such accidents, however, may be strongly informed by the availability and display of other kinds of capital (e.g., economic, social, symbolic) which mediate how and whether the school and other educational institutions 'recognises' students' cultural capital as legitimate, 'authentic', 'genuine' and so forth (i.e., as symbolic capital).

By this account, discourses of educational administration, accountability, standards and evaluation are attempts 'fix' the literacy problem by ensuring that school systems have internally coherent, visible and rational of rules for the valuation and transformation of embodied, objectified and institutional capital. That is, the aim of state schooling is to develop explicit and ostensibly 'fair' rules for the transformation and conversion of that which is learned and practiced (embodied capital), into visible material forms of texts and discourses that give evidence of that which is learned and practice (objectified capital), which in turn can be recognised as sufficient to yield appropriate credentials (institutional capital): official inter-institutional verifications that embodied and objectified capital have been achieved. Following the meritocratic goals of most state systems in the West, there is some attempt -- with varying local and regional degrees of success -- to militate against differences in the construction of students' institutional capital that simply mirror and reproduce differences in economic and social capital.

But explicitness does not necessarily indicate validity. It is also worth noting that the relationship between 'explicitness' and 'fairness' continues to be the subject of considerable debate among literacy educators (Bernstein, 1990). Australian and American critics of progressivist pedagogy argue that some variations of holistic models naturalise particular

interactional patterns and textual practices in ways that systematically exclude those students for economically marginal and culturally different backgrounds (e.g., Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Delpit, 1988). The model I have suggested here suggests that questions of explicitness cannot be considered except in relation to the actual validity and effects of the rules of transformation of capital themselves. That is, to debate whether and how the rules of transformation are 'explicit' or 'hidden' to teachers, students, communities, parents and others, must additionally take up the issues of what kinds of embodied or objectified capital will 'count' within the school for purposes of credentialling. Just because many textual practices are 'done' in the school, required by academic and curricular tradition, and 'explicit' requirements for credentialling does not necessarily mean that they should be taught. They equally may be forms of symbolic violence, of the imposition of arbitrary codes and practices for the purposes of establishing class, difference and distinction in a particular social field.

Students graduate from institutions with embodied, objectified and institutional capital. The school thus has a constitutive role in literacy education. But that shaping role is constrained and limited by, inter alia: its internal contradictions and anomalies in the shaping of embodied, objectified and institutional capital; and its inability to control the field-specific markets for this kind of cultural capital and other kinds of capital. My point here is that the school's selective tradition may frame and construct, for instance, ability to write genre 'X' or read text 'Y' with signs of comprehension to count as embodied and objectified (into practice) capital, as worthy of a school diploma, certificate, 'grade', 'mark' or so forth However, an employer or tertiary institution working in a different institutional and discursive field may have very different evaluation of the student's cultural capital. That employer might interpret differing relationships between the forms of cultural capital than those intended by the educational institution. As many school systems have found out, this could lead to a delegitimation of their credentials (i.e., their degrees are not seen as being worth anything), or a questioning of the objectified capital presented by the student (i.e., "s/he must have had someone else do the work"), or a querying of the student's embodied capital (i.e., "for someone from that institution, s/he doesn't appear to have the talent") -- all this with disastrous effect for the student.

Earlier in this paper, I reviewed some hypothetical narratives to show how folk theories of literacy track outward from the school to larger community, economic and cultural fields. While effects within the school are based on the assumption that different kinds of embodied capital will yield different kinds of institutional capital, it is necessary to move outside of the school

into other social fields to provide a fuller explanation of the consequences of literacy. By Bourdieu's account, the value of students' cultural capital across their life trajectory is contingent on the availability of economic and social capital.

Economic capital refers to the material goods and resources available to the student that are directly translatable into money. For example: a student may have developed practices and dispositions in the school, an adequate portfolio that displays 'worth' and the relevant credential. But without requisite economic capital -- whether provided through wage labor, inherited wealth, state support or another form of institutional intervention -- s/he may have insufficient resources to access other social fields. The lack of economic capital may influence health, physical mobility, appearance, and other material factors in ways that severely preclude movement within and across fields. Simply, cultural capital may be of extremely limited exchange value if one has insufficient financial resources to gain even rudimentary entry into institutions such as job markets, further training, government agencies and so forth.

Social capital refers to this direct access to social and cultural institutions and organisations. While a student may acquire requisite cultural capital, recognition of "official knowledge", practice and competence, and even have some source of economic capital -- actual access to social institutions may be contingent on culture, class, gender and other factors that influence how subjects are identified (e.g., 'racialised', 'gendered'). That is, group, community, cultural identification and membership may mediate who can gain access to formal institutions (e.g., governments, political parties, educational institutions, corporations) and to less formal but no less powerful 'clubs', cultural and subcultural organisations, business networks and so forth. In instances, access to such groups is mediated by inherited membership, invitation, or even secret cant. Here issues of legal access and discrimination may come into play in those many social institutions that continue to exclude on the basis of ostensive class background, racial phenotype, gender, sexual preference, disability, and other forms of difference.

What this means in terms of the literate's life trajectory is that one may have requisite cultural capital for, say, entry into an educational institution or job sector, and have sufficient economic capital, but be disbarred on the basis of inadequate social capital. In contrast, one may have marginal cultural capital, but sufficient economic capital to 'buy' access to the club. Or, for that matter, through inheritance, one may have access to a corporation through the social capital of family or community ties despite not having the legally required institutional capital or even the cash.

Depending on the rules of conversion, this suggests that a set of ameliorative 'trade offs' of different kinds of capital may be possible. Actual conversions and transformations of capital are governed by explicit and implicit rules, precedents and conventions within social fields/institutions -- as much as they may be governed by issues of availability of and demand for 'human resources', 'talent', 'taste' and so forth.

Symbolic capital refers to recognition of the possession of capital as such. That is, one may have cultural, economic and social capital and enter a field where these might have some convertible 'value'. But unless that institution recognises the capital as such, that value will not be convertible. Symbolic capital, then, is an overarching category for describing the 'uptake' of other forms of capital within specific social fields. Assume then, that student 'X' can write genres, read with comprehension, deconstruct texts, that there is credentialled evidence of this, and that she has some level of tangible economic resources and access. Is this necessary and sufficient to guarantee success? Unfortunately not.

All forms of capital must be verified, they must be acknowledged and in some way officially 'deemed' to be of value. In this sense, just having money, access or skill is not good enough, unless it is evaluated as sufficient. There is no guarantee that literate cultural capital, however apparently necessary for success, is sufficient for it. **Capital is not capital unless it is recognised as such authoritatively in a particular social field.** That recognition can come in the form of legislated recognition that, say, a particular credential must be 'counted' as having value, or it may come in the form of connoisseurship -- the judgement of "taste" embodied in the habitus of the human subjects within a particular field or institution (Bourdieu, 1984).

As I noted earlier, many contemporary folk theories of literacy assume that school acquired cultural capital is a causal factor for particular social, economic and cultural outcomes. To summarise: schools clearly can 'make a difference' in the construction of students' cultural capital. The selective traditions of literacy education may have a key role in shaping students' habituses and building their cultural capital. Schooling entails the acquisition of embodied practices, development of a 'portfolio' of discursive and material demonstrations of those practices, and achievement of actual institutional credentials. But educational institutions cannot provide product guarantees for the value of this capital. How and whether that cultural capital comes to 'count' is contingent on:

(1) the availability of other forms of economic and social capital; that is, that the student has sufficient convertible material resources and actual access to social institutions;

(2) the laws of conversion and exchange in particular social and discursive fields; that is, that the student's capital is relevant to the demands set in the explicit and implicit systems of exchange of particular social institutions;

(3) the dejure and defacto recognition of the students' capital as such by those who are in positions to govern the exchange of capital; that is, that there is institutional recognition of the value of the student's capital.

Bourdieu's categories enable us to retheorise the significance of literacy in narrative life trajectories, and to reframe commonsense accounts of those life trajectories. They require that we consider the range and complexity of possible social fields that students may enter, and the local interrelationships between cultural, economic, social and symbolic capital in these particular fields. Within this framework, we can turn to reexamine the purported and ostensible 'power' literacy as a stand alone constituent component of cultural capital.

The Limits of Schooling, Literacy and Cultural Capital

Can literacy make a difference? Is school-acquired literacy powerful? I have here tried to introduce some vocabulary and perspectives that might lead us towards a critical sociology of the fields of practice where literacy is used in fast capitalist societies. In a sense, teachers and curriculum developers are involved in a curious mixture of futures trading and science fiction, taking educated guesses and bets on the construction of particular forms of the habitus that will have some degree of durability, value, and relevance in particular markets, some of which do not even exist yet. Because of the locality and dynamism of these markets, there can be no grand formula that says method X will yield literacy Y, that will yield exchange value Z. Beware of folk theories of literacy, particularly in state and globalised economies where the 'education' of 'human capital' is posed as a panacea to structural economic and social problems.

The troubling aspect of this paper is the apparent gap between its first move and its second: its willingness to assign dominant truth claims about the powers of school literacy to the status of folk theories, and then its apparent eagerness to substitute a mode of sociological description [1]. But

what I have proposed here is not a set of 'Truths' about the intrinsic characteristics of literacy acquisition and pedagogy. It is a provisional template drawn broadly from Bourdieu that may be of use for looking at local pedagogic schemes and approaches to literacy, and for evaluating the possibilities and limits of literacy education. The power, value and efficacy of literacy as cultural capital depend on the availability of other forms capital in specific local fields. We can conceive of these social fields as institutional fields of discourse ranging from workplaces and community institutions, to particular disciplinary and professional fields of study. These fields in turn require officially and informally acknowledged fluency with particular discourses and practices.

Yet the local and the contextual are not totally idiosyncratic, nor are they the benign sites of negotiation suggested in many interactionist and ethnographic studies. Local sites are riddled through and through with material relations of capital, "systems of communication and exchange" that "punctuate" and "mediate" everyday social relations (Wilden, 1982). This means that the corporation, the economy, state bureaucracy, 'professions' and 'disciplines' and so forth are crucial players in constraining and mediating the definition and construction of what literate practices will count, how, where and for whom. Institutional interventions apparently unrelated to literacy -- practices governing, for instance, welfare payments, school lunches, anti-discrimination laws, racial-vilification laws, housing and so forth -- potentially set conditions for the exchange and conversion of capital. These conditions influence whether and how students' literate cultural capital may count, although not in direct causal ways suggested by the policy and press statements with which I began this paper. What this means is that lack of economic capital (poverty), lack of social capital (overt exclusion and discrimination on the basis of culture, class, gender, sexual preference, disability, and so forth) and social conventions and procedures that fail to recognise capital (narrow, elitist schemata for what counts as a successful literate among government, educational authorities, employing authorities) may set up severe field-specific constraints on students' ability to acquire and use literate cultural capital.

Is this a recipe for despair? If, indeed, the powers of literacies are contingent on matters beyond the scope of conventional curriculum theorising and instructional intervention -- does this by definition render the project of education in postmodern conditions futile [2] ? I think not. Individual teachers and individual students can make differences, but only given enabling social and economic circumstances.

Recently, a colleague involved in whole language reform in Aboriginal education commented that she had believed that these methods would

make a difference in enhancing children's life chances, and that at the time the approaches appeared to be increasing students "cultural capital". Several years down the track, she reported, it did not appear that her work with these students had significantly altered their life trajectories (Joan Kale, pers. com., 3/95). My point in this paper has been that the particular folk theories of success built into popular approaches to literacy education should be treated with a degree of sociological skepticism. Whether and how a 'whole language', 'genre' or 'skills' program might have an impact on students' life trajectories all depends. Differing approaches to literacy are not 'right' or wrong, but that they are forms of normative intervention by which institutions construct literate practice, canons, and social subjectivities. The literacies constructed by pedagogies are affiliated with differing kinds and levels of cultural capital, the value and use of which are sociologically contingent. It would be misleading to suggest that these Aboriginal children's success and failure could be attributed to 'method' or schooling per se -- but that is precisely the kind of claim that has been and continues to be made by some educational advocates publicly and professionally.

What might this mean for teachers, curriculum developers and researchers? It means that to teach and research in these new social, economic and cultural conditions, we must all become sociologists of the local -- testing folk theories of literacy against possible life trajectories across emergent social fields, analysing and critiquing the local institutional fields where capital is transformed and exchanged. It also means that social change and radically improved life opportunities for students of marginal groups require struggle across the board: for better living and working conditions, for better health and social infrastructure and support, for less discriminatory social institutions, for the equitable distribution of material and symbolic resources. Without these, all the cultural capital in the world won't make much of a difference, regardless of what the story says.

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Notes

1. Bourdieu's model has been critiqued as determinist and structuralist. There is evidence of this in the early Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) work, where early language and literacy socialisation appears to be a structural determination in the first instance of one's class trajectory. Part of the certainty of that determination can be explained by reference to the fact that Bourdieu's analysis was based on the French educational and class system.

2. See Willinsky's (in press) comments in this regard, and his suggestions for an historical approach to critical literacies.

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